

QUESTION 13

Choosing

Next, we have to consider acts of the will that are related to a means to an end. There are three such acts: choosing, consenting, and using. And deliberating precedes choosing. So we must first consider the act of choosing (question 13); second, the act of deliberating (question 14); third, the act of consenting (question 15); and, fourth, the act of using (question 16).

As regards the act of choosing, there are six questions: (1) Which power does this act belong to, the will or reason? (2) Does the act of choosing belong to brute animals? (3) Is the act of choosing directed only toward a means to an end, or is it sometimes directed toward an end as well? (4) Is the act of choosing directed only toward what we do? (5) Is the act of choosing directed only toward what is possible? (6) Does a man choose freely or with necessity?

Article 1

Is choosing an act of the will or an act of reason?

It seems that choosing is an act of reason and not of the will:

Objection 1: Choosing implies a certain comparison in which one thing is preferred to another. But it is reason's role to compare. Therefore, the act of choosing belongs to reason.

Objection 2: The same power that reasons syllogistically is the one that comes to conclusions. But it is reason's role to reason syllogistically in matters of action (*in operabilibus*). Therefore, since, as *Ethics* 6 says, the act of choosing is, in matters of action, something like a conclusion, it seems that the act of choosing is an act that belongs to reason.

Objection 3: Ignorance belongs to a cognitive power and not to the will. But as *Ethics* 3 says, there is a certain "ignorance involved in choosing" (*ignorantia electionis*). Therefore, it seems that the act of choosing belongs to reason and not to the will.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says that the act of choosing "is a desire for things that are within our power" (*desiderium eorum quae sunt in nobis*). But desiring is an act of the will. Therefore, so is choosing.

I respond: The name 'act of choosing' (*electio*) implies something having to do with reason or intellect and something having to do with the will. For as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 6, "Choosing is an appetitive understanding or an intellectual appetite (*appetitivus intellectus vel appetitus intellectivus*)."

Now whenever two things come together to constitute some one thing, the one of them is like a form with respect to the other (*est ut formale respectu alterius*). Hence, Gregory of Nyssa says that choosing "is neither an act of desiring in its own right, nor just an act of deliberating, but is instead something composed of them. For just as we say that an animal is composed of a soul and a body, and that it is not the body by itself or just the soul, but both, so too with the act of choosing." Notice, however, that among the acts of the soul, an act that belongs essentially to one power or habit receives its form and species from a higher power or habit to the extent that the lower power or habit is ordered by the higher one. For instance, if someone exercises an act of courage because of his love for God, the act is, to be sure, materially an act of courage, but it is formally an act of charity.

Now it is clear that reason in some sense precedes the will and orders its act, viz., insofar as the will tends toward its object in accord with the order of reason, given that the apprehensive power presents the appetitive power with its object. So, then, because the act by which the will tends toward something proposed to it as a good is ordered by reason toward the good, it is materially an act of the will, but formally an act of reason.

However, in this sort of thing the substance of the act is related as matter (*materialiter se habet*) to

the order imposed by the higher power. And so an act of choosing is in substance (*substantialiter*) an act of the will and not of reason. For an act of choosing is brought to completion in a movement of the soul toward the good that is being chosen. Hence, it is clear that it is an act of the appetitive power.

Reply to objection 1: ‘Choosing’ implies a comparison that precedes it, but it is not itself essentially the comparison.

Reply to objection 2: The conclusion of a syllogism that has to do with actions also belongs to reason and is called a ‘determination’ or ‘judgment’ (*dicitur sententia vel iudicium*), which the act of choosing follows upon. And it is because of this that the conclusion itself seems to belong to the act of choosing as its consequence.

Reply to objection 3: Choosing is said to involve ignorance not because the act of choosing is itself an act of knowing, but because it is not known what will be chosen.

Article 2

Does the act of choosing belong to brute animals?

It seems that the act of choosing belongs to brute animals:

Objection 1: As *Ethics* 3 says, an act of choosing is “desiring something for the sake of an end.” But brute animals desire things for the sake of an end, since they act for the sake of an end and out of desire. Therefore, the act of choosing exists in brute animals.

Objection 2: The name ‘choosing’ seems to signify that something is taken in preference to other things. But brute animals take certain things in preference to others, as is manifestly clear when a sheep eats one plant and rejects another. Therefore, the act of choosing exists in animals.

Objection 3: As *Ethics* 6 says, “Prudence involves someone’s choosing in the right way a means to an end.” But prudence belongs to brute animals; hence, at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* it says, “All of the animals that cannot hear sounds, e.g., bees, are prudent without having learned it.” And this same point also seems evident to the senses, since marvelous instances of wisdom (*mirabiles sagacitates*) appear in the works of animals such as bees and spiders and dogs. For if a dog that is tracking a stag comes to a crossroads, it explores by smelling to determine if the stag has taken the first road or the second road, and if it discovers that the stag has not taken either of them, it immediately starts off confidently along the third road without exploring; it is as if the dog were using a disjunctive syllogism so as to be able to conclude that the stag has taken the third road from the premise that it has not taken either of the other two, given that there are no more roads. Therefore, it seems that the act of choosing belongs to brute animals.

But contrary to this: Gregory of Nyssa says, “Children and non-rational animals do things voluntarily, but not by choosing.” Therefore, the act of choosing does not exist in brute animals.

I respond: Since the act of choosing involves taking one thing in preference to another, it must be the case that choosing is related to more than one thing that can be chosen. And so choosing has no place in matters that are completely determined to a single outcome.

Now the difference between the sentient appetite and the will is that, as is clear from what was said above (q. 1, a. 2), the sentient appetite is determined to a single *particular* thing in accord with the order of nature, whereas the will is determined to a single *general* thing, viz., the good, in accord with the order of nature, but is indeterminate with respect to *particular* goods. And so choosing belongs properly to the will, but not to the sentient appetite, which is the only appetite found in brute animals. Because of this, the act of choosing does not belong to brute animals.

Reply to objection 1: Not every case of desiring something for the sake of an end is called an act of choosing, but only those cases that involve discriminating one thing from another. But there is no

place for this except where the appetite can be directed toward more than one thing.

Reply to objection 2: A brute animal takes one thing in preference to another because its appetite is naturally determined to that very thing. Hence, as soon as something toward which its appetite is naturally inclined is presented to it through its sensory power or imagination, it is moved toward that thing alone without any act of choosing—just as fire moves upward rather than downward without an act of choosing.

Reply to objection 3: As *Physics* 3 says, movement is an act of a movable thing that has its source in the mover (*motus est actus mobilis a movente*). And so it is the mover's power that is apparent in a movable thing's movement. Because of this, the order of the mover's reason is apparent in all things that are moved by reason, even if the things themselves do not have reason. For instance, it is because of the archer's motion that the arrow tends directly toward the target as if it itself possessed directive reason.

Again, the same thing is apparent in the movements of clocks and all other human inventions that are made by art. But in the way that artifacts are related to human art, so all natural things are related to God's art. And so as *Physics* 2 says, an order appears in things that are moved in accord with nature, just as it does in things that are moved by reason. And the reason why it is possible for instances of wisdom to appear in the works of brute animals is that they have a natural inclination toward well-ordered processes of the sort ordained by the highest art. It because of this, and not because they have reason or choice, that certain animals are even called 'prudent' or 'wise'—something that is apparent from the fact that all the animals which share the same nature operate in a similar way.

Article 3

Is an act of choosing directed only toward the means to an end?

It seems that an act of choosing is not directed only toward the means to an end:

Objection 1: In *Ethics* 6 the Philosopher says, "Virtue brings about a correct act of choosing, but if anything is apt to be done for the sake of that virtue (*illius gratia*), then it comes not from the virtue but from some other power." But that for the sake of which something is done is an end. Therefore, an act of choosing is directed toward the end.

Objection 2: 'Choosing' implies preferring one thing to another. But just as one means to an end can be preferred to another, so too one of a number of diverse ends can be preferred to the others. Therefore, an act of choosing can be directed toward an end as well as toward a means to an end.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, "Willing is directed toward the end, whereas choosing is directed toward the means to an end."

I respond: As has already been explained (a. 1), an act of choosing follows upon a determination or judgment that is like the conclusion of a practical syllogism (*sicut conclusio syllogismi operativi*). Hence, what falls under an act of choosing is like the conclusion in a syllogism about actions (*ut conclusio in syllogismo operabilium*). But as *Physics* 2 says, in the case of actions, the end is like a principle and not like a conclusion. Hence, the end as such does not fall under an act of choosing.

However, just as, in the case of speculative matters, nothing prevents something that is a principle in one demonstration or science from being a conclusion in some other demonstration or science, so too it is possible for what serves as an end in the case of one action to be ordered toward something else as its own end. And it is in this sense that an end falls under an act of choosing. For instance, in a physician's act, health is the end, and so it does not fall under the physician's act of choosing; instead, his act of choosing presupposes that end as a principle. However, bodily health is ordered toward the good of the soul, and so in the eyes of someone who looks after the health of the soul, being healthy or being sick can fall under an act of choosing. For as the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "When I am

weak, then I am strong.”

By contrast, the ultimate end does not in any way fall under an act of choosing.

Reply to objection 1: The proper ends of the virtues are ordered toward beatitude as their ultimate end. And it is in this way that an act of choosing can be directed toward those ends.

Reply to objection 2: As was established above (q. 1, a. 5), there is just one ultimate end. Hence, whenever there is more than one end, there can be an act of choosing from among them insofar as they are ordered toward the ultimate end.

Article 4

Is it only with respect to human acts that there is an act of choosing?

It seems that it is not only with respect to human acts that there is an act of choosing:

Objection 1: An act of choosing is directed toward the means to an end. But as *Physics 2* points out, the means to an end include not only acts but also instruments (*organa*). Therefore, it is not only with respect to human acts that there are acts of choosing.

Objection 2: Acting is distinct from contemplating. But choosing has a place even within contemplating, viz., insofar as one opinion is preferred to another. Therefore, it is not only with respect to human acts that there is an act of choosing.

Objection 3: Men are chosen to certain offices, whether secular or ecclesiastical, by those who do nothing with respect to them. Therefore, it is not only with respect to human acts that there is an act of choosing.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 3* the Philosopher says, “No one chooses anything other than what he thinks will be done by him.”

I respond: Just as an act of intending is directed toward an end, so an act of choosing is directed toward a means to that end.

Now the end is either an action or a thing (*aliqua res*). When the end is a thing, then some human action must intervene either (a) in the sense that the man effects the thing which is the end (hence the physician’s end is to effect health), or (b) in the sense that the man in some way uses or enjoys the thing that is the end, as in the case in which money, or possessing money, is the greedy man’s end.

We should say the same thing about a means to an end. For a means to an end must be either (a) an action or (b) a thing along with an intervening action through which one either effects this means to the end or uses it. And this is the sense in which an act of choosing is always directed toward human acts.

Reply to objection 1: The instruments are ordered toward the end insofar as a man uses them for the sake of the end.

Reply to objection 2: Contemplating includes within itself the act of the intellect’s assenting to this or that opinion. It is instead *exterior* action that is divided off from contemplation.

Reply to objection 3: A man who chooses a bishop or a prince for a city chooses to name him to such an office (*eligit nominare ipsum in talem dignitatem*). Otherwise, if there were no action on his part that established someone as the bishop or the prince, then the choice would not belong to him. Similarly, one should claim that whenever one thing is said to be chosen in preference to another, some further operation on the part of the chooser is involved there (*adiungitur ibi aliqua operatio eligentis*).

Article 5

Is an act of choosing directed only toward what is possible?

It seems that an act of choosing is not directed only toward what is possible (*non sit solum possibilium*):

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), choosing is an act of the will. But *Ethics* 3 says, “Willing is directed toward what is impossible.” Therefore, so is choosing.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 4), choosing is directed toward things that are done by us. Therefore, as far as choosing is concerned, it makes no difference whether what is chosen is impossible absolutely speaking or whether instead it is impossible for the one who is doing the choosing. But we often choose what we cannot bring to completion and is thus impossible for us. Therefore, an act of choosing can be directed toward what is impossible.

Objection 3: A man does not attempt to do anything except by choosing. But St. Benedict says that if a prelate commands something impossible, then it should be attempted. Therefore, an act of choosing can be directed toward what is impossible.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says that an act of choosing is not directed toward what is impossible.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 4), our acts of choosing are always directed toward our actions. But the things done by us are always possible for us. Hence, one must claim that an act of choosing is directed only toward what is possible.

Similarly, the reason for choosing something is that it leads to an end. But no one can attain to an end by means of what is impossible. An indication of this is that when in their deliberations men arrive at what is impossible for them, they desist as if unable to proceed any further.

The same point is also manifestly apparent from the reasoning process that precedes an act of choosing. For a means to an end, toward which an act of choosing is directed, is related to that end in the way that a principle is related to a conclusion. But it is clear that an impossible conclusion does not follow from a possible principle. Hence, an end cannot be possible unless some means to the end is possible. But no one is moved toward what is impossible. Hence, no one would tend toward an end unless it appeared to him that some means to that end were possible.

Hence, what is impossible does not fall under an act of choosing.

Reply to objection 1: The will stands between (*media est*) the intellect and the exterior operation, since the intellect proposes the will’s object to it, and the will itself is a cause of the exterior action.

So, then, the beginning of the will’s movement is thought of as coming from the intellect, which apprehends something as good in general; but the terminus of the will’s movement, i.e., the completion of the will’s act, involves its being ordered toward the operation by which one tends toward the attainment of the thing. For the will’s movement is from the soul toward the thing. And so the completion of the will’s act involves there being something good for someone to do. But this sort of thing is possible. And so a *complete* act of will is directed only toward something possible that is a good for the one willing it.

However, there is an *incomplete* act of willing that is directed toward a thing that is impossible; some call it a ‘quasi-willing’ (*velleitas*) because the thing in question would be willed if it were possible.

By contrast, ‘choosing’ names an act of the will that is already determinate with respect to what is to be done. And so an act of choosing is not directed in any sense toward what is not possible.

Reply to objection 2: Since the will’s object is an apprehended good, one has to judge the will’s object according to the way in which it falls under apprehension. And so just as an act of willing is sometimes directed toward something that is apprehended as good and yet is not truly good, so too sometimes there is an act of choosing that is directed toward what is apprehended as possible for the

chooser and yet is not in fact possible for him.

Reply to objection 3: St. Benedict says this because a subordinate should not decide by his own judgement whether or not something is possible; instead, in every case he should abide by his superior's judgment.

Article 6

Does a man choose with necessity?

It seems that a man chooses with necessity:

Objection 1: As is clear from *Ethics* 7, the end is related to what can be chosen in the way that principles are related to what follows from those principles. But conclusions are deduced from principles with necessity. Therefore, it is with necessity that someone is moved to choose on the basis of the end.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 1), an act of choosing follows upon a judgment of reason about things to be done. But reason judges with necessity concerning certain things because the premises are necessary. Therefore, it seems that an act of choosing likewise follows with necessity.

Objection 3: If any two things are absolutely equal, then a man is moved toward the one no more than toward the other. For instance, if a starving man (*famelicus*) has two equally desirable portions of food at an equal distance from him in different directions, he is not moved toward the one more than toward the other. (Plato made this claim and gave as the reason for it the immobility of the earth at the center of the universe, as *De Caelo* 2 says.) But, *a fortiori*, something that is taken to be less good can no more be chosen than something that is taken to be equally good. Therefore, if two or more things are proposed and one of them appears better (*maius*) than the others, then it is impossible to choose any of the others. Therefore, what appears to be the most excellent (*eminentius*) is chosen with necessity. But every act of choosing has to do with something that seems better in some way. Therefore, every act of choosing occurs with necessity.

But contrary to this: Choosing is the act of a rational power and, according to the Philosopher, a rational power is open to opposites.

I respond: A man does not choose with necessity.

This is because what is possibly not such-and-such is not necessarily such-and-such. But the reason why it is possible either not to choose or to choose can be taken from a man's twofold power. For a man is able to will and able not to will, able to act and able not to act, and he is likewise able to will *this* or to will *that* and able to do *this* or to do *that*.

The explanation for this is taken from the very power of reason. For the will is able to tend toward whatever reason is able to apprehend as a good. But reason is able to apprehend as a good not only willing or doing such-and-such, but also not willing or not doing such-and-such. Again, in the case of all *particular* goods, reason is able to think of an aspect of goodness or of a lack of goodness (i.e., an aspect of badness), and accordingly it can apprehend each good of this sort either as something able to be chosen or as something able to be avoided (*non potest unumquodque huiusmodi bonorum apprehendere ut eligibile vel fugibile*).

By contrast, it is only the *perfect* good, viz., beatitude, that reason is unable to apprehend as something bad or defective (*non potest ratio apprehendere sub ratione mali aut alicuius defectus*). And so a man wills beatitude with necessity and is not able to will not to be blessed (*beatus*), i.e., not able to will to be non-blessed (*miser*). But since, as has already been explained (a. 3), an act of choosing is directed toward a means to an end and not toward the end, it is not directed toward the perfect good, viz., beatitude, but is instead directed toward other, particular, goods. And so a man chooses freely and not with necessity.

Reply to objection 1: A conclusion does not always proceed with necessity from its principles, but

does so only when the principles cannot be true if the conclusion is not true. Similarly, it need not always be the case that because of the end there is a necessity for a man's choosing a given means to the end. For not every means to an end is such that the end cannot be had without it—or, if it is that way, it is not always being thought of in that way (*aut, si tale sit, non semper sub tali ratione consideratur*).

Reply to objection 2: Reason's determination or judgment about things to be done has to do with contingent things which can be done by us and in which the conclusions do not necessarily follow from principles that are necessary with absolute necessity; instead, the conclusions follow from principles that are necessary only with a conditional necessity, as in 'If something is running, then it is moving'.

Reply to objection 3: If two things are proposed that are equal when thought of in one way, nothing prevents it from being the case that (a) some condition might be thought of in the one by which it is better than the other and that (b) the will should be turned toward that one rather than the other.